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ABSTRACT

Secondary teachers must help students to expand vocabulary skills, to understand and apply ideas in complex reading material, and to improve organizational and work-study skills. To assess reading instruction at the junior high school level in one school district, classroom observations were made of teachers of mathematics, science, social studies, and English. Observers' written reports noted aspects of the programs which appeared to be helping students improve their reading skills, as well as areas of reading instruction that needed improvement. Departmental meetings were held at which reading specialists discussed specific problems; the specialists then visited the classrooms to demonstrate, to test, and to observe. Ongoing activities have included development of an English curriculum guide for helping students to read literary selections; continuing observations and follow-up by administrators and reading supervisors; provision of materials for teachers, both for self-improvement and for use with students; special reading programs for pre-college students, foreign-born students, and remedial students; and speed and power reading courses. As a result of such programs, reading scores of junior high school students have improved, and students are showing more interest in reading assignments. (GW)

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YES, SECONDARY TEACHERS DO TEACH READING

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YES, SECONDARY TEACHERS DO TEACH READING

For many years secondary teachers did not concern themselves with teaching reading skills since these were supposedly taught and learned in the elementary grades. But as our knowledge of how students learned to read, and our analysis of the process of reading became more sophisticated, it has become increasingly clear that elementary teachers cannot teach all the reading skills needed at the higher levels of learning. Secondary teachers must teach reading skills.

But, do they? Most secondary teachers are utilizing some good reading skills. Many teachers are concerned with vocabulary development. They do try to guide students' reading. They are trying to ask questions that elicit the student's thought processes and conclusions. In short, yes, secondary teachers are teaching reading, but there is a tremendous need to improve the teachers' skills.

What kind of skills must be taught? First, students must continue to expand vocabulary skills; second, they need to increase their capacity to understand more complex materials and apply the

necessary thinking skills to relate, rethink, and reorganize present knowledge: Lastly, they must continue to improve their organizational and work-study skills.

Many reading specialist and secondary administrators have found it extremely difficult to institute change when it comes to the teaching of reading at the secondary level. One gentleman in an inservice reading course for secondary teachers told me the district should hire enough reading teachers to teach all students all needed reading skills. What an expenditure that would have been for the district.

Reading improvement at the secondary school level has often revolved about the reading specialist and has had little to do with the classroom teacher. If we are to make changes at the secondary level to improve reading skills, it is necessary that every teacher involved with the use of books in their courses must become more proficient in how to help youngsters improve their reading skills.

For years, as we worked to improve the reading program in the district, our approach was to work first with the elementary teachers to be sure that

they were sending pupils to the secondary level who possessed reading skills to the best of their ability. Once we were sure that elementary teachers could not be faulted, we then approached the secondary level. Over the years we have tried to offer teacher workshops on how to incorporate reading skills into their programs and on ways to improve comprehension and vocabulary skills. In most instances we were very nicely but forcefully rebuffed! It soon reached the stage where reading specialist at the secondary level did not care to offer further group programs because teachers lacked interest.

With the help of secondary administrators we decided to try once again to improve secondary reading skills. This time our initial thrust was to discuss with the secondary teachers exactly what we wanted. We indicated to them that we had done all we could possibly do with the students at the elementary level. We discussed how we provided the students with a variety of helps that had made them the best readers possible. Now it was up to secondary teachers to extend those skills.

One of the things we emphasized most was that we did not expect secondary teachers to become involved in the teaching of phonics. Unfortunately, secondary teachers still feel that phonics is reading. As soon as they heard us discussing reading improvement, they felt we expected them to teach consonants, vowel sounds, blends, etc. When we reassured them that this was not the case, some of the apprehension that they had began to disappear. We then could discuss with the teachers what we meant by "reading".

We explained that there were many new vocabulary terms which students really did not comprehend; that secondary materials were written in a style quite different than that used in elementary readers, and that there had been little opportunity for students to vary their speed of reading. One of the most interesting insights we gained was that many of the teachers themselves felt that there was only one speed to be used in reading and that was the one you were most comfortable with. Other teachers seem to feel that if you read too rapidly you were not going to gain any information from the printed page. It was generally felt that all material was to be read at the same pace and in the same fashion.

We then began by identifying for them the basic skills that we were interested in having them develop through their material. In emphasing and enlightening the teachers as to the reading skills needed by their students, we began to calm their fears about their teaching of reading.

Our next step was to say to teachers, "If we are going to help you, one of the things we must know is exactly how you are including the development of reading skills into your program." This then led to classroom observation of their teaching.

During the observations we were not interested in whether they were following their plan book or the course of study. We were only interested in the on-going classroom lesson to see if good reading skills were being utilized.

During the classroom observations, it was interesting to note some of the things that we had talked about with teachers were very observable. For instance, teachers were still putting just page numbers on the blackboard and saying, "Read this for homework tonight". In the area of vocabulary we were most surprised to find that teachers actually were helping students in terms of

carefully defining and redefining vocabulary terms so that they were familiar to the student. We also noted that teachers were concerned about complex sentences and complex ideas. Tremendous amounts of time was spent helping students to understand how the author presented ideas. We also observed teachers giving students specific helps on how to study more carefully for specific purposes.

After we had concluded our classroom observations, a report was written to each department chairman in each junior high school. In that report we included as many positive aspects of the program as we could. We also included, where necessary, comments about areas of reading instruction that was felt to need improvement. Here are some of the positive comments made to the departments:

Mathematics:

- Considerable time was spent on vocabulary directly related to math. Basic concepts were repeatedly reviewed until they were understood by most students.
- When working with math word problems, careful attention was given to locating facts important to the solution of the problem.

- Stated formulas were reviewed in a variety of teaching approaches as a means of helping the students relate and recall them.
- Oral reading was used when problems were incorrect or difficult to understand. This is a good method to use when attention needs to be concentrated.
- Symbols were reviewed whenever necessary to insure students' understanding.

Science

- Basic concepts were taught or reviewed in a wide variety of approaches. Teachers usually checked to be sure the concepts were understood before proceeding to other concepts.
- Diagrams and charts were used to help students understand basic concepts.
- Vocabulary terms related to science, as well as general vocabulary, were checked and taught as necessary.
- The sequence of steps necessary to conducting experiments was observed being used by the students.
- Much attention was devoted to the development of details as they related to the main idea.

- Considerable attention was focused on reading for specific details in science.
- Pupils were helped to generalize their findings or readings and to offer supporting detail.
- Outlines, showing the relationship of ideas developed in the textbook, were written on the board as an organizational guide to the students.
- The structure and order of scientific readings was emphasized in many ways.

Social Studies:

- Class discussions usually involved a good review of concepts and was extremely motivating to students.
- Vocabulary was a constant focus throughout each lesson. New words were discussed and known words were used in a variety of ways, all to insure familiarity with them.
- Visual aides of various types, i.e., maps, filmstrips, etc., were used to enrich and enhance the lesson and make reading matter meaningful.
- Discussion questions that were asked required students to not only recall the facts stated

in the textbook, but also required students to draw conclusions, make inferences, determine cause and effect, and other inference-type skills.

- Teaching approaches appeared to be geared to the reading levels of the students. Where students were able to handle textbook materials, more was expected from the students; where students had difficulty reading the texts, teachers supplemented the lesson to a greater extent.
- Oral reading was used to clarify ideas or to emphasize major points.

English:

- Careful attention was directed to vocabulary during both reading and listening activities. Reference was made to the contextual setting of words.
- Many good interpretive questions were asked. Unfortunately, there is still more emphasis placed on literal type questioning than on questions which require deeper thought processes.
- Important notes for study or review were placed on the blackboard, making it easier for each student to note important facts.

- Introductory and explanatory material was read aloud by either the teacher or a student. Oral reading used in this fashion helps students focus on important points or provides stronger motivation.
- Individual instruction was given to students during a library research period.

Suggestions for improvement to each department included such comments as:

Math:

- It was suggested that particularly when working with slow students that not too many concepts, problems and/or symbols be reviewed at one time. Multiplicity of ideas tend to confuse these students even more than usual.
- General vocabulary often proves difficult for some students who are having vocabulary difficulties with words in general.

Science:

- At no time during the visitations was there an opportunity to observe how assignments

were given. Since much of the program indicates that there was considerable attention devoted to reading, it is hoped that student assignments will be given in a thoughtful, purposeful fashion.

Social Studies:

- When the lecture method was employed as the major approach to teaching, student interest was at an all time low. But when lecture was used to clarify or modify, it was well received by the students and became meaningful.
- In a few instances, teacher questioned pupils without providing an opportunity for thought on the part of the pupils. Sometimes teachers answered questions before pupils had a chance to offer their own explanations.
- Specific vocabulary development was a sometimes "muddy" area. In a few instances, definitions did not appear to give students the help necessary to successfully understand a word. Mostly these were abstract words that were difficult to define and where students needed all the help they could get.
- Filmstrips, movies, slides, need to have immediate

application to the reading matter at hand. Their greatest impact can be made if they are directly related to material to be read for homework that day or to material read the previous day.

- Teachers should provide opportunity for students to think before expecting an answer to some questions. Interpretive questions that require a rearrangement or restructuring of ideas takes time. Teachers often answer these questions themselves, since it appears no one knows the answer.

English:

- Directions to students relating to class activities should be given in a clear, concise manner. If a teacher cannot deliver orderly directions, pupils will become confused and have difficulty ordering their own thoughts.
- In a few instances, teachers talked constantly, providing little opportunity for students to respond.
- Pupils should be encouraged to practice reading their oral reports aloud before delivering them to the class. Class time might be provided for

students to work in pairs on such a project.

- Permit more students to interract in the classroom discussions based upon listening and reading activities.
- Oral reading is a valuable tool to emphasize or highlight printed material or when studying plays. It can also be used to determine the quality of a student's reading ability. Oral reading looses much of its impact when used to read narrative material for extended periods of time.

As a result of the comments, departmental meetings were held and reading specialists invited to discuss specific problems. The reading specialists were also invited by classroom teachers to visit their classrooms to demonstrate, to test, and to observe. Teachers became more concerned and involved in utilizing good reading techniques.

One of our greatest concerns, was our finding that English teachers probably did less in terms of vocabulary enrichment and the development of comprehension than many of the other content teachers. Therefore, with the help of some of the English teachers during the following summer, we developed

a curriculum guide. This curriculum guide consisted of the selection of eight or nine stories from a literature book. We identified the more difficult vocabulary words, suggested ways that they might approach the teaching of reading of these particular selections, and provided follow-up worksheets and questions that teachers might use orally or silently. That guide has proved to be invaluable since it has provided examples of lessons that we were interested in having them follow through with on other literary selections.

As we have made our observations in subsequent years, we have noted that there have been improvements in the teaching of literature. We plan to continue our summer curriculum work this year by having a social studies team develop a mini-course geared to providing slower students with needed reading skills. This is a direct result of competencies needed to pass the Basic Competency Test now demanded by New York State. We are planning a unit of work which will provide students with both reading helps and basic social studies knowledge. In addition, these same students will continue to improve their overall reading skills.

Teachers are now becoming more aware of the need for the development of reading skills throughout the content area subjects. Unfortunately the basic competency tests that are being utilized in the State of New York cover only minimal skills. We in the school setting must continue to work with teachers who instruct average and above average students and to continue their efforts in promoting good reading habits with these students.

Each year we have added a new dimension to the curriculum in terms of the improvement of reading. We have continued to stress that teachers incorporate good reading skills into a curriculum. On-going observations by principals and assistant principals, as well as the reading supervisor, have strengthened the program. We have been able to provide materials for teachers, both for self-improvement and for use with students. In the first year, when we introduced new reading materials, we told teachers that we expected they would try these materials. When they were ready to demonstrate to us that they were utilizing better reading skills, they were asked to invite us to observe. It was also made clear that if they did not notify us they were ready to demonstrate their reading skills, we would then make an appointment to observe.

Observations were made by both the principal and reading supervisor at different times. Comments were made pertaining to the lesson plan, execution and follow-up.

Outside of observations of the classroom teachers, it is difficult to evaluate the on-going program except through yearly testing scores. Over the years we have noted that the reading scores of students at the secondary level continue to decline as the students progress through the grades. The interesting phenomenon we noted was that most students in the seventh and eighth grades were not doing as well as we would expect in terms of their reading achievement, yet by the time they reached the twelfth grade our norm for the district rose to approximately the 75th percentile. Something was happening, but what? With our emphasis upon the development of reading skills at the secondary level, reading scores of the students in the junior high school are making a turn-around. Students appear to be doing better according to the standardized results. We also are getting feedback from junior high teachers that students are becoming more involved in reading assignments of various types.

Teachers now permit students to do more class time reading, rather than expecting that reading will always be done at home. A number of years ago a young reading specialist at the junior high school asked me what would happen if he permitted his class to become involved in free reading for a whole period. He wanted to know what he would say to an administrator who happened by informally or formally to observe his teaching. The answer given was that reading skills needed supervised practice. Unfortunately, some secondary administrators often have felt that a class involved in reading activities and/or independent study was wasting time. Silent reading is an active part of any good teaching plan, and like any other activity can be over-done or under-done. It is also necessary that we help teachers at the secondary level to recognize that in teaching a reading skill as part of a content area it may be necessary to practice that skill during class time. This insures that students understand what it is that you are attempting to teach them. Once you are sure that students are able to utilize a skill, then it is possible for that skill to be utilized in a home-work assignment.

It was mentioned before that our school district does provide intensive remedial work for students who are reading below level. It has been our belief for many years that secondary teachers do not possess all of the necessary reading skills to help those students who might be classified as "remedial reading" pupils. Therefore at the end of our sixth grade, we test all pupils on a reading test to determine which students are reading below grade level. If we find a student is six months or more below level in reading, we then schedule him for a full period of reading every day for a full year at the junior high school level. The student is enrolled in a class of approximately 20 students and is provided with the best reading helps that we can offer. At the end of the year all students are retested and those who are found to have made sufficient growth are dropped from the program. Those who have not made sufficient growth and are still retarded in reading skills, are maintained in the program during eighth grade and if necessary during ninth grade. During ninth grade all students are retested again and with the help of the reading specialist at the junior high school a decision is made as to what reading helps will be needed at the senior high school.

Students who are intending to continue on to college are encouraged to enroll in a pre-college reading program and for some of these students this can be taken in lieu of an English course. Students who are reading at, or slightly below level with low scores in speed of reading, are enrolled in a Speed and Power course which meets daily for one semester. Students who are reading two to three years below level are enrolled in another section of Speed and Power which meets daily but for a full year. And lastly, for a hand full of students who have not achieved sixth grade level, we enroll them in a course which we call ITA. This program uses high interest materials transposed into the Intitial Teaching Alphabet as a means of helping students improve their reading skills. This program has been extremely successful over the years. In some years we have not been able to offer it simply because we do not have enought students reading at the lower levels. In addition to all of this our senior high reading specialist also sets aside a period a day to meet with foreign born students. Over the years we have been enrolling more and more students who are unable to read and speak English fluently. We offer to these students an opportunity

to improve their reading and speaking of English skills.

What else can be done to help secondary students to improve their reading? First of all we must have a commitment from secondary administrators that they believe that reading is an important aspect of the total instructional program. Secondly, that commitment must become the commitment of each staff member. And third, we must provide opportunities for the teacher to (1) recognize the reading skills which they are utilizing with their students, (2) provide opportunities for teachers to improve their teaching of reading skills, and (3) provide them with materials necessary to meet the reading needs of the students they are working with. Without these commitments we cannot and will not have a program at the secondary level designed to meet the increasing needs of the secondary students.

Do secondary teachers teach reading? I sincerely believe they do. Our job as reading specialists is to gauge their abilities, plan a program of awareness, and provide them with a non-threatening program to improve their teaching skills.